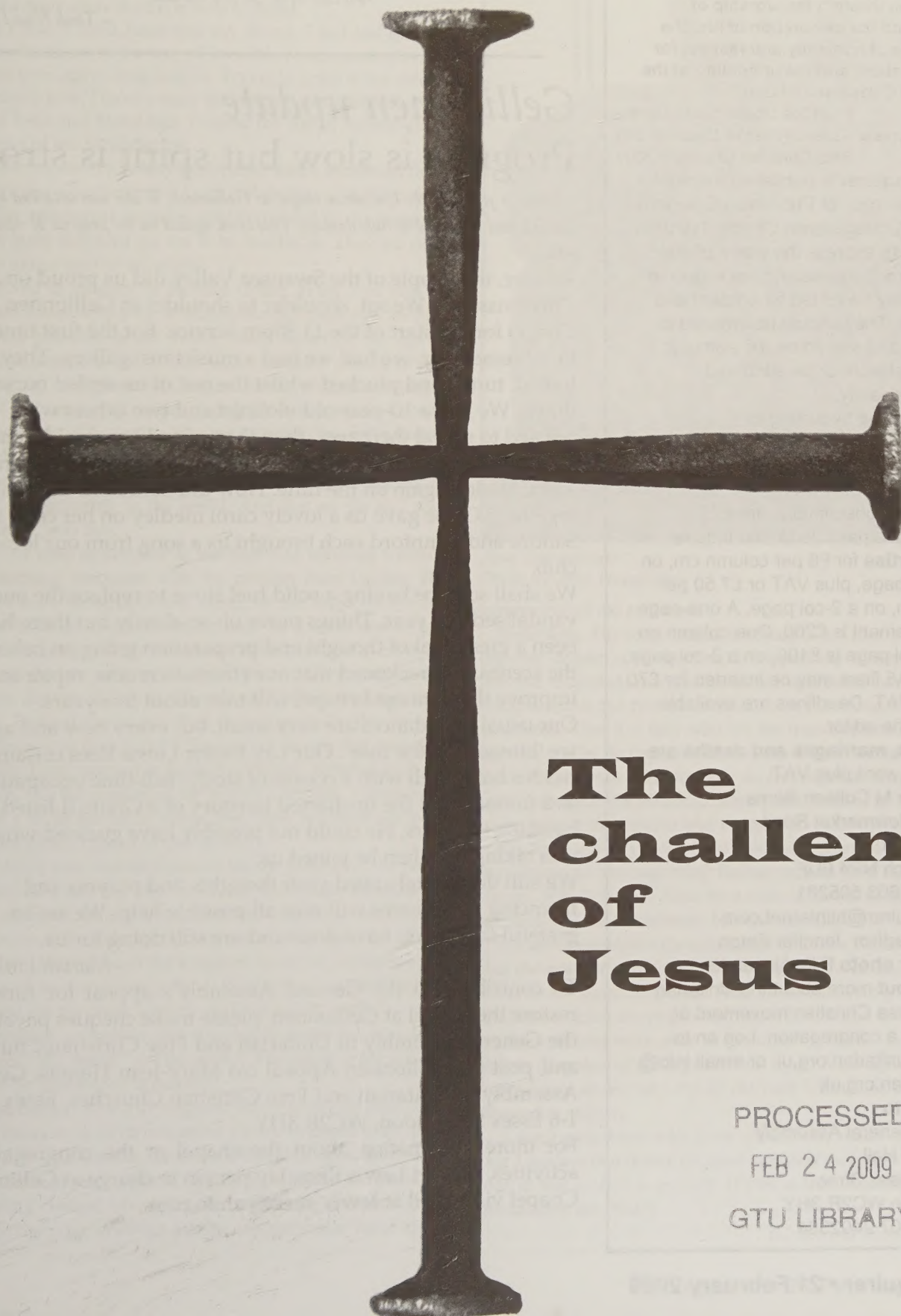


The INQUIRER

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The voice of British and Irish Unitarians and Free Christians Issue 7716 21 February 2009



The challenge of Jesus

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The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

Established 1842

The Inquirer is the oldest

Nonconformist religious newspaper

"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."

From the Object passed at the General Assembly of the Unitarian and Free Christian Churches 2001

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Inquiring Words

People usually consider walking on water or in thin air a miracle. But I think the real miracle is not to walk either on water or in thin air, but to walk on Earth. Every day we are engaged in a miracle which we don't even recognise: a blue sky, white clouds, green leaves, the black, curious eyes of a child – our own two eyes. All is a miracle.

– Thich Nhat Hanh

Gellionnen update

Progress is slow but spirit is strong

(Almost a year ago, the Unitarian chapel at Gellionnen, Wales was attacked by vandals and sustained terrible damage. This is an update on the progress of repairs. --ed.)

As ever, the people of the Swansea Valley did us proud on Christmas Eve. We sat, shoulder to shoulder in Gellionnen Chapel for the start of the 11.30pm service. For the first time that I remember, we had we had a musicians' gallery. They tooted, tuned and plucked whilst the rest of us settled ourselves down. We had a 10-year-old violinist and two others who refused to reveal their ages, then there was 10-year-old Tomas in the corner, Josie on the tenor horn, Hywel on the euphonium and Caradog again on the flute. How did Sara hold them all together? Chloe gave us a lovely carol medley on her cello and Sandra and Lynnford each brought us a song from our local folk club.

We shall soon be having a solid fuel stove to replace the one vandalised last year. Things move oh-so-slowly but there has been a great deal of thought and preparation going on behind the scenes. It is reckoned that our efforts to renew, repair and improve the damaged chapel will take about five years. Our usual attendances are very small, but every now and again we 'blossom as the rose'. Our Lay Pastor Lewis Rees certainly has his hands full with a course of study, full-time occupation as a fireman and the uncharted territory of a Grade II listed building in tatters. He could not possibly have guessed what he was taking on when he joined us.

We still desperately need your thoughts and prayers and financing our dreams will take all possible help. We are so grateful for all you have done and are still doing for us.

– Marian Littlepage

To contribute to the General Assembly's appeal for funds to restore the chapel at Gellionnen, please make cheques payable to the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches and post to: Gellionnen Appeal c/o Mary-Jean Hennis, General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, Essex Hall, 1-6 Essex St, London, WC2R 3HY

For more information about the chapel or the congregation's activities, contact Lewis Rees, lay person in charge at Gellionnen Chapel via e-mail at lewis_rees@yahoo.com

Return to the religion of slaves

As Lent begins on Wednesday, **Jane Barraclough** explores Jesus's radical devotion to the poor.

I found a heart in the heart of the city,

I found a heart where there is none to be found...

When I was a child Jesus was my friend. I had had quite a few predecessors in the way of invisible companions, having a rather over-active imagination. Trying to grasp at the shreds of memory now, I have a nasty feeling that particular incarnation of Jesus had blond hair. I blame the Aryan stained-glass windows of our local church.

On the one hand it is easy to dispense with a childhood faith as naive and superficial. But I still feel the loss of it. The sense of safety and eternal companionship provided by the presence of that good shepherd are not to be scoffed at. They are simply no longer part of my world.

I arrived to ministry in Bethnal Green, in the East End of London, armed with a bit of Buddhism and some new inkling of divine presence in the world. Years earlier, at the age of 20, I had marched out of the Anglo-Catholic church of my upbringing, in high moral dudgeon at the wicked carryings-on of Christians of all stripes during the Reformation. I doubt that the study of history to advanced level in English secondary schools often produces revolutionary tendencies – but I was convinced Karl Marx was right: religion was responsible for all the suffering in the world. And that, as far as I was concerned, was that.

But my time as minister in the East End involved a rather disconcerting encounter with the prophet from Galilee. He doesn't have blond hair any more, by the way. He's a bit grubby because he's been on the road for a while and he has an alarming light of conviction and determination in his eye.

Working-class congregations are thin on the ground in the London district, in fact in the national Unitarian picture as a whole. Bethnal Green and Bow is economically the poorest constituency in the United Kingdom (or should that read dis-united?). I was warned in hushed whispers, before I took up the post, that the congregation "is very Christian, you know." It took a while for me to realise that these two facts are, perhaps not oddly, related to one another.

For Jesus was, and continues to be, the prophet of the poor, the excluded and the oppressed. He heals untouchables by touching them, he sits down to feast with those considered well beyond the Pale by the doyens of respectability of his own time. His vision of the kingdom involves a complete inversion of the social hierarchy as known then and to this day: "Blessed are the poor, for they shall inherit the earth."

A message so radical that translators down the ages have preferred "the meek" to "the poor." The meek, after all, can usually be guaranteed to behave.

In the context of world religions, this is pretty unusual. Hinduism saves most of its initiations for the Brahmin caste, even to this day. The Buddha, despite his demands upon his followers in terms of renunciation, largely preached to the merchant and ruling classes. Islam, despite its rigorous demands about care for the poor, does not ascribe any particular value to the



Jane Barraclough

Photo by John Hewerdine

perspective of the excluded.

Jesus does. His most radical teaching is not that we should dig ever deeper in our pockets to support the vulnerable, but that the excluded, marginalised, and oppressed have something to teach the rest of us about how the world should be structured. That it is they who are the true prophets of a new age that might be desirable to live in. That a world more in line with God's longing for how we live together, might completely abandon the power structures that those of us at the top of the heap have come to take for granted.

For hundreds of years, Christianity was scorned by the ruling classes of the crumbling Roman empire as a religion of slaves. Which it was. Then by a curious series of inversions and hypocrisies, Christianity became the religion of empire.

A friend once visited the catacombs of Rome. There he found that the most ancient depictions were at eye-level, and showed Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Then he visited some of the most ancient churches above ground, where the images were higher on the wall, and more often in royal garb. Finally, he noticed that in churches of the high Middle Ages, Jesus typically appeared only at the very top of the wall behind the altar, enthroned in majesty.

'I don't quite know why Jesus climbed the walls,' he wrote, 'but I suspect that it was because we could no longer stand to look at him eyeball to eyeball.' (Cited in John Buehrens – Understanding the Bible)

(Continued on next page)

Jesus, a terrible mortal huntsman

(Continued from previous page)

And in this way, a new Christianity was born. Constantinian Christianity, one that told the meek they would be rewarded in heaven, that the flesh was sinful and to be ignored, that there was no hope of human beings ever living at peace with God and one another because we were innately too sinful, that this life didn't matter. And, by and large, prosperity gospel – its 21st century incarnation – is what you will get these days in the name of Christianity. This gospel teaches that wealth is God's reward for a righteous life and pastoral advice includes where to find a suitable plastic surgeon so that God-fearing wives can fulfil biblical teachings on pleasing their husbands. Make no mistake, London bankers will not bend the knee beside the inhabitants of worlds they prefer to know nothing about. The world that lies, as it always has, outside the city walls.

It is no great surprise really that the ruling classes should engage in creative interpretations of the teachings of Jesus. In fact, the real surprise is that such radical teachings should have survived at all. As the privileged caste, not only of Europe but as Europeans, of the world, we don't like being told to give up our stuff. We like stuff. We work for it, we shop for it, and we are going to enjoy it. Damn it. The fact that we don't really enjoy it that much when it is all piled up just makes us want to run out and buy more stuff. After all, if we finally find the right stuff we will finally, finally be happy. Won't we?

One of the most courageous sermons I ever heard was by a Unitarian Universalist minister when I was a student in Oxford. He said the fact that Unitarian Universalists didn't like Jesus much was to do with their own success and the value

they set by their own success, both personally and as a denomination. And no matter how you slice the salami, Jesus was a loser. He hung out with losers and – worst of all – he died a loser's death. I just hope that preacher had the guts to preach that sermon in his home town.

If we give up on the doctrine of atonement, that Jesus died to pay for our sins, all we are left with are his teachings. And Unitarians may be privileged but we are not, in the main, fools. We have a healthy tendency to literalism so that when Jesus says, "If you have two coats, give one away," we don't over-interpret. We just know it's difficult to live with one coat when you could, if you chose, have two. As someone with a penchant for coats, I know this.

So, on the whole, we prefer to keep a healthy distance from the teachings of the Galilean prophet. But I wonder for how long we can maintain what is in fact a choice to ignore the truth. The planet is already groaning under our excesses ... you know the rest.

As H. G. Wells once said: *Jesus was like some terrible mortal huntsman digging mankind out of the snug burrows in which they had lived hitherto. In the white blaze of his kingdom, there was to be no property, no privilege, no pride, no precedence; no motive indeed, and no reward but love.*

The Jesus I now see is still covered with the dust of the desert, a radical with a burning vision of a new kingdom. Not a comfortable companion, it must be said.

The Rev Jane Barraclough is minister at Cross Street Chapel, Manchester. This article was previously published in 'Oscailt', the Dublin Unitarian magazine.

Hibbert Assemblies

For some years now the Hibbert Trust has built up a web resource for both primary and secondary school assemblies. Based round particular themes, the web pages offer readings, prayers, activities, and suggested hymns, many originally written, and all of a non-denominational character.

Kate Taylor has acted as web-mistress for some years, and would now like assistance. Teachers of primary or secondary pupils would be especially welcome, but anyone with experience of working with young people is also encouraged to get in touch. An honorarium is payable for each suite of assembly pages.

Please make your interest known to the Trust Secretary:

Kay Millard
1 The Maltings, 63 Westbury Leigh, Westbury
BA13 3SF
Phone 01373 827856
e-mail: kay.millard@btinternet.com

Have a look at the website at
www.hibbertassemblies.org.uk

Global Chalice Lighting

The International Council of Unitarians and Universalists announces the 66th in its monthly series of global chalice lighting readings. Every month, a reading is distributed to Unitarian and Universalist congregations around the world. Each congregation is asked to use the reading for one worship service in the designated month, identifying it as the 'Global Chalice Lighting' for that month and naming the group which submitted it. It is hoped that the ICUU Global Chalice Lighting Project will enhance the worship experience in our congregations and raise awareness of the international dimensions of our religious movement.

This Global Chalice Lighting is to be used during February 2009.

**With malice toward none, with charity for all,
with firmness in the right,
as God gives us to see the right,
let us ... achieve and cherish a just and
lasting peace among ourselves, and with
all nations.**

– Abraham Lincoln, Second Inaugural Address,
submitted by European Unitarian Universalists
www.euu.uua.org

New church dedicated in Chennai

Touched by the terrible condition of the Chennai church, Unitarians from all over Britain contributed to the building fund. **Mike West** tells of the joyous dedication of the new building.

The new building of the Chennai Unitarian Christian Church was opened on 25 January amid scenes of joyful celebration. Warm messages of greeting and fellowship were received by the church from its Unitarian friends across the globe. The ceremony was attended by the Rev Carleywell Lyngdoh, Executive Secretary of the Indian Council of Unitarian Churches, representatives from Unitarian churches in Meghalaya, Hyderabad, Assam, and Erode, and Jon Bagust and Mike West from the Edinburgh Unitarian church.

Contributions to the funding of the new building came from Chennai's partner churches in Glasgow and Edinburgh, from congregations and friends across the United Kingdom, from Unitarian Universalists in the United States, Canada, Australia and Europe and from fellow Unitarian friends in Meghalaya. In the UK, some 29 Unitarian churches and four district associations responded to the appeal launched in 2006, and a large number of Unitarian individuals and friends contributed, either directly, or through their churches.

It was clear that the appeal funds sent to the Chennai congregation for the new building (a total of £27,100) had been put to exceptionally good use. The building programme had been managed very capably indeed, and the result was a beautiful modern church and first floor hall with many fine features.

On opening the new church, Edinburgh Unitarian Jon Bagust reflected on the worst monsoon weather in living memory in December 2005, which had accelerated the deterioration of their 200-year-old building and led to the launch of an



With chalices on the fence and the facade, Chennai Unitarians incorporated symbols into their new building. Photo by Mike West

appeal in 2006. He noted that the Chennai church might be the loneliest on the planet, but that it had an abundance of well-wishers across the globe who admired the Chennai church for its outreach work in the Chennai community and its support for the children at the night school in the rural village Ammanambakkam. He quoted the words of the Tamil poet Tiru Valluvar, who said, "There is nothing more glorious than to persist in the advance of the community". Jon expressed his special admiration for the speedy and successful way in which the Rev Harrison Kingsley organised and managed the rebuilding of their church.

The Chennai church expressed their deep gratitude to all those who had given donations, and also thanked personally the builders, masons, carpenters and other tradesmen who attended the opening ceremony. Their visitors were splendidly entertained by a programme of Indian dance and song followed by a celebratory meal.

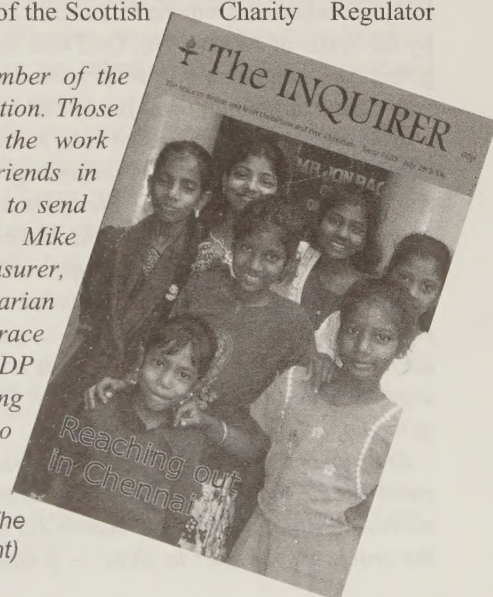
A smaller, second phase of the building project is planned to provide second floor accommodation for the church's outreach work in due course. The Chennai Fund was granted charitable status by the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator last September.

Mike West is a member of the Edinburgh congregation. Those willing to support the work of our Unitarian friends in Chennai are invited to send a contribution to Mike West, Fund Treasurer, St Mark's Unitarian Church 7 Castle Terrace Edinburgh EH1 2DP Scotland UK, making cheques payable to the 'Chennai Fund'.

The Chennai appeal was covered in The Inquirer in 2006. (right)



'God is Love' says the wall at the back of the altar at the newly built Chennai Unitarian Church. Photo by Mike West



Inheritance from a King: the

Richard Boeke, a veteran of US Civil Rights struggles, traces the Unitarian themes Barack Obama draws from Martin Luther King Jr.

Martin Luther King, Jr told us, 'So long as a man has a dream in his heart, he cannot lose the significance of living.' He told us, 'If a man hasn't discovered something that he will die for, he isn't fit to live.'

The night before Martin was murdered in Tennessee, he told us, 'I have been to the mountain top and I have looked over, and I have seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you, but I want you to know that we as a people shall reach the Promised Land. So, I'm happy tonight, I'm not worried about anything: I'm not fearing any man.' (3 Apr. 1968).

At his funeral in Atlanta, the text from Genesis was, 'Behold, let us kill the dreamer and see what becomes of his dream.'

Martin and I both were born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia. But in the segregated south, we never saw each other. Atlanta had no black police. The black community had no vote. They lived in ghettos. There were no black students in Georgia Tech or in the University of Georgia. There were no black public officials. Martin's father was ML King Sr, pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church – all black, just as my church on Peachtree Road was all white.

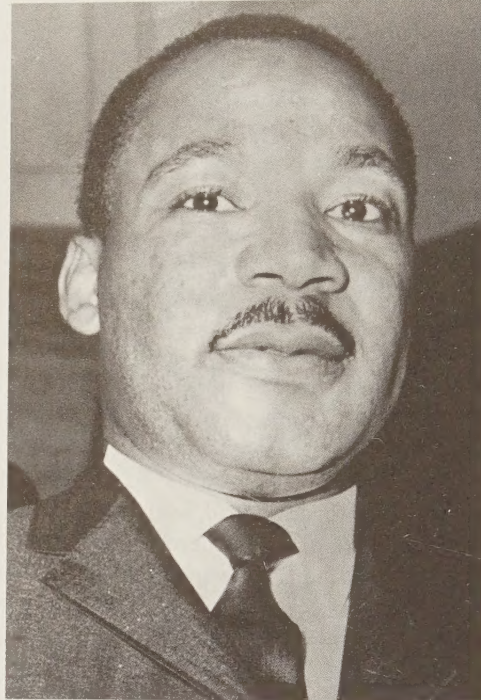
One year ago, on 20 January 2008, at Ebenezer Baptist Church, Barack Obama used words from Martin King, to tell us, 'Unity is the great need of the hour.' He took us back to the story of Joshua entering the Promised Land, and being blocked by the walls of Jericho. But God told the people to stand together and march round the city. And on Seventh Day, the walls came tumbling down. Barack told us:

'There are many lessons to take from this passage ... my mind went back to the very beginning of the modern Civil Rights Era. Because before Memphis and the mountaintop, before the bridge in Selma and the March on Washington, before Birmingham and the beatings. ... On the eve of the bus boycotts in Montgomery, at a time when many were still doubtful about the possibility of change, ... and at times mistrusted each other, King inspired with words not on anger, but of an urgency which still speaks to us today: Unity is the great need of the hour.'

King understood that if just one person chose to walk instead of ride the bus, those walls of oppression would not be moved. ... But if a few more women did what Rosa Parks had, the cracks would start to show ... if enough Americans were

awakened to injustice, perhaps that wall would come tumbling down, and 'justice would flow like waters, and righteousness like a might stream.'

'Unity is the great need of the hour ... not because it sounds pleasant or because it makes us feel good, but because it's the only way we can overcome the essential deficit that exists in this country.'



Dr Martin Luther King Jr, on the day he received the Nobel Peace Prize. Library of Congress photo.

'I'm not talking about a budget deficit. ... I'm talking about a moral deficit. I'm talking about an empathy deficit. I'm talking about an inability ... to understand that we are our brother's keeper; we are our sister's keeper, that in the words of Dr King, we are all tied together in a single garment of destiny.'

'Dr King led this country through the wilderness. ... He spoke not just to the children of slaves, but also to the children of slave owners. ... He led with words, but he also let with deeds. ... He led by marching and going to jail.'

He led by taking a stand against the war in Vietnam, knowing it would diminish his popularity ... Dr King understood that unity cannot be won on the cheap; that we have to earn it through great effort and determination.'

Obama has taken the lesson of unity to heart. In his campaign, a million volunteers reached out to 200 million Americans. Many have criticised Obama for inviting an Evangelical to give the invocation at his inauguration.

The Evangelical stands for many good causes, but opposes gay marriage. For the benediction, Obama has chosen a civil rights leader who supports equality for gays and lesbians. In choosing his cabinet, Obama learned from a new book on Abraham Lincoln, 'A Team of Rivals'. Like Lincoln, Obama has picked several rivals, such as Hilary Clinton, to be members of his cabinet.

Last month I was at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington. In the 1930s, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the DAR, would not allow a black Woman to sing in Constitution Hall. Eleanor Roosevelt resigned from the DAR, and arranged for Marian Anderson to sing at the Lincoln Memorial.

In 1963 with a friend, I drove all night from Massachusetts to join the march on Washington. A quarter-million Americans heard the man who been jailed in Birmingham tell us, 'I have a dream'.

Obama is a worker for the dream: *Hold fast to dreams, / For if dreams die, / Life is a broken winged bird / That cannot fly.* (Langston Hughes)

In the spirit of the words of Isaiah, which inspired Martin King, Obama dreams, *'Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill shall be made low ... And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.'*

He comes into power in the midst of a world torn apart by violence and fear: in the midst of the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression of 1929.

Power of Obama's message

In the midst of millions on both sides who believe that 'the war on terror' must be a fight to the death. The open wound of Gaza and Israel has brought millions of us back to marches like the protests against the Vietnam War. Marches like the million of us who marched in London, crying out to stop the invasion of Iraq. Now, as Obama becomes President, headlines read that the British Foreign Secretary says, 'The war on terror was a mistake,' that may have caused more harm than good. ... the West cannot 'kill its way' out of the threats it faces.¹

What happened in the past few years is a reminder that leaders can make a difference for good or ill. Too many good people avoid politics as a dirty business. They cite the words of Lord Acton, 'Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely.' Unitarian theologian James Luther Adams replied, 'Lack of power tends to corrupt. And absolute lack of power tends to corrupt absolutely.'

Empowerment is one of great themes of Barack Obama's book, 'Dreams from my Father', a spiritual autobiography.² Barack summed up his story in these words: *I am the son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas. I was raised with the help of a white grandfather who survived the Depression to serve in Patton's army in World War II and a white grandmother who worked on a bomber assembly line at Fort Leavenworth while he was overseas. I've gone to some of the best schools in America and lived in one of world's poorest nations.*³

Barack, born of two races, starts school with Muslims in Indonesia, plays basketball in Hawaii, seeks 'roots' in Kenya, is a 'community organiser' in south Chicago. Barack's first name means 'blessed.' To a few he is 'the Messiah,' who will lead us out of all our troubles.

Barack in his speeches is very clear. He cannot do it. He says, 'Yes, we can. We can do it.' He is conscious of the 'Power of organization and the organization of power.'⁴ He views his task not as taking power, but to empower. Michelle Obama says of her husband, 'He is not first and foremost a politician. He's a community activist exploring the viability of politics to make change.'⁵

Obama's activism is the spirit of Gandhi's 'Truth Force.'

It is the spirit of Edwin Markham's words: *He drew a circle to shut me out: Heretic, Rebel, a thing to flout. But love and I*

had the wit to win; We drew a circle that took him in.

While Obama is not a Unitarian, his grandparents had Unitarian sympathies. After the election, Obama attended his Grandmother's Memorial Service at the Unitarian Church of Honolulu. In his inclusiveness, Obama breathes the spirit of oneness that is the essence of our Unitarian Faith. He teaches not the oneness of individualism, or of 'Only One Way' religion, but a 'this world' Christianity, cherishing a loving healing Jesus, not a mythic judge coming soon to bring a judgment day.⁶

To organise for oneness, start with a community. As a community activist in Chicago, Obama found that faith-based communities, churches, were the groups he could work with to bring about social change. Not just Christian Churches, but with all faith groups that seek justice and the vitality of spiritual oneness.

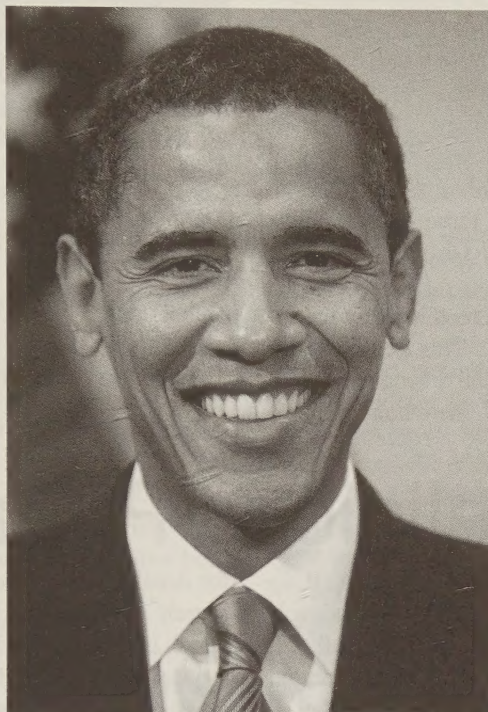
Alice Walker, author of 'The Color Purple', wrote these words to Obama: 'You have no idea, really, of how profound this moment is for us, the black people of the southern United States. ... But seeing you delivering the torch so many others before you carried ... is almost more than the heart can bear. ... I would advise you to remember that you did not create the disaster that the world is experiencing and you alone are not responsible for bringing the world back to balance. A primary responsibility ... is to cultivate happiness in your

own life. Make a schedule which permits sufficient time for rest and play with your wife and daughters ... Because finally it is the soul that must be preserved. All else might be lost, but when the soul dies, the connection to Earth, to peoples, to animals, to rivers, to mountain ranges, purple and majestic, also dies.'

Alice Walker points to Obama's special message of hope to religious liberals: That a religious life, keeping the dream, can effect change today. Whether we start in Britain or America, or Pakistan or Israel, we are called to stop the blame game and accept accountability together.⁷

We shall live with the 'Audacity of Hope'. As Martin Luther King said the night before he was murdered: 'I may not go there with you, but I know we as a people shall get to the promised land.' ... Yes we can ...

The Rev Richard Boeke is a retired Unitarian minister, living in Horsham.



US President Barack Obama Photo courtesy of the Obama-Biden transition project.

¹ 'War on Terror was a Mistake, says Miliband' - The Guardian, 15, 01, 2009, p. 1

² Barack Obama, 'Dreams from my Father', Random House, 2004 (first published 1995)

³ Ibid, p. 11

⁴ James Luther Adams, UU Theologian who taught at Chicago and Harvard.

⁵ Michelle Obama, quoted by Madeleine Bunting, The Guardian, 17 Jan 2009, p.25.

⁶ For the 'Smiling Jesus' of early Christian icons, see 'Saving Paradise', by Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Parker, Beacon Press 2008.

⁷ Peter Dunlap, 'Awakening our faith in the future: Obama's Renewal of our liberal identity,' 'Tikkun,' 08/11. 2008. Dunlap's article in the journal 'Tikkun,' tells us, 'Obama has actually thought through at a new pitch what it means to be religious ...'.

Concert series continues at Padiham

It was a great pleasure to welcome the mayor and mayoress of Pendle, and the Mayor and mayoress of Padiham and a packed church, for our third concert given by The Houghton Weavers on 17 January. By general acclaim, we had the best concert they had given us. Despite the appalling weather it was wonderful to see the church 'filled to the brim!' Nevertheless, judging by the smiles on peoples faces as they made their way home and by numerous positive comments, visitors to our concert had had another enjoyable evening with us.

The fourth concert in the current series will be given at 7.30 pm on 7 March by Helen Davies, a brilliant percussionist, playing the Marimba, Vibraphone, Xylophone, and Glockenspiel, accompanied on the piano by the talented James Davy (sub-organist at Blackburn Cathedral). He will also play some solo pieces on our much spoken about three manual high-specification digital organ. Admission is £6, including light refreshments.

The final concert will be given at 7.30pm on 8 May by the internationally known Swing Commanders. This exceptionally talented group of six musicians, who regularly broadcast, play folk, rock, C&W songs from the shows – the whole range of



Barry Brown, concert organiser, with the Houghton Weavers. (Front row l to r) Mayor/Mayoress of Padiham, Mayoress/Mayor of Pendle, Maureen Brown, the Rev Jean McNeile. Concerts this year are raising money this year for NWAir Ambulance, and the Children's Heart Surgery Fund at Leeds.

music.

Tickets are £6 including light refreshments. They will be in short supply, so book early. Further information 01282 773336 or email barryrbrown@googlemail.com

– Barry R. Brown

Affirming Religious Pluralism 2009

World Congress of Faiths presents the series: 'Affirming Religious Pluralism 2009' Several presentations are planned, following a Darwin event held on 19 February at Essex Hall.

'Healing the Scars of Conflict' led by Mairead Maguire and Donald Reeves, is from 9:30 am to 6:30 pm, on Saturday, 7 March at The Abbey at Sutton Courtney. Price, including coffee, vegetarian lunch and tea is £50.

Mairead Maguire became active with the peace movement in Northern Ireland after three children of her sister, Anne Maguire, were run over and killed by a car driven by Danny Lennon, a Provisional Irish Republican Army man who was fatally shot by British troops while trying to make a getaway. Mairead and Betty Williams, who had witnessed the event, co-founded Women for Peace, which later became the Community for Peace People. They received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1977. Donald Reeves was Vicar of St James', Piccadilly in the 1980s and has in recent years led the 'Soul of Europe', which initiated a ground breaking project in Banja Luka in Western Bosnia – including the rebuilding of the Ferhadija Mosque – which has helped to bring reconciliation and regeneration to the city and has been a model for similar work elsewhere.

Those who wish may like to spend Friday and/or Saturday night at the Abbey and enjoy the peace and beauty of the Abbey and its gardens. The price for supper, bed and breakfast is £40. Bookings and enquiries should be made to the Abbey, Sutton Courtenay, Abingdon, Oxfordshire, OX14 4AF

admin@theabbey.uk.com; www.theabbey.uk.com, 01235 847401.

Parliament of World Religions

Pre-Parliament event at the Global Retreat Centre near Oxford, 17th -19th March. This event will explain the vision and history of the Parliament and the World Congress of Faiths contribution to the Parliament.

A preview of the Parliament of the World's Religions planned

for Australia later this year will take place from 4.30pm on 19 March at Australia House, Strand, London. The Parliament, which is planned for 3-9 December 2009, will be discussed by the Rev Dr Marcus Braybrooke, president of the World Congress of Faiths, Sister Maureen Goodwin and Zabrina Santiago, deputy director and partner cities director, Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions. For security requirements at Australia House it is essential that anyone attending register ahead of time and bring a photo ID. Reply by the 9th March to: Liz Corrigan Tel: 020 8727 3355, email: liz.corrigan@uk.bkwsu.org or by post to Brahma Kumaris, Global Co-operation House, 65-69 Pound Lane, London NW10

Younghusband Lecture

'The Relevance of Ahimsa', a talk by Samain Passanna Pragma, a Jain Nun will be given at 6.30pm on 7 May at Sri Guru Singh Sabha at Gurdwara, Hounslow, Middlesex, TW3 3UA and will be preceded by the WCF annual meeting.

'Beacons of the Light' book launch

A launch for the new book titled 'Beacons of the Light', by the Rev Dr Marcus Braybrooke at 5.30pm for 6, on 9 July at Essex Hall, Essex Street, London. Rabbi Jackie Tabick will chair.

Interfaith celebration of animals

Golders Green Unitarian Church will host a service to celebrate animals at 3pm on 6 September. The church is located at 31½ Hoop Lane NW11 8BS.

140th Anniversary of Gandhi's birth

The 140th Anniversary of the birth of Mahatma Gandhi will be marked by presenters V Kapashi, Jay Lakhani and M Braybrooke, with music by Seeta Lakhani on 1 October at 5.30pm for 6 at Essex Hall, 1-6 Essex Street, London WC2R 3HY.

For information, contact Dr Richard Boeke on 01403 257 801 or e-mail r.boeke@virgin.net

Minister takes his faith to work

Aside from congregational ministry, few Unitarians work professionally on behalf of their faith. A notable exception is the Rev Chris Wilson, college chaplain at Cambridge Regional College. **Jim Corrigan** caught up with Chris at a Holocaust Memorial service.

Q: Chris, what is your job at Cambridge Regional College?
I'm College Chaplain – and also Curriculum Quality Leader for Social Cohesion. I have set up, and currently run, the Multi-Faith Chaplaincy team at the College. These roles combine with my national trade union role as a part-time national officer for the Association of Teachers and Lecturers.

Q: How does being a Unitarian inform what you do?
As a Unitarian and Free Christian, this work represents a natural expression of my faith, which effectively combines with my small (but rather wonderful) church ministry at Old Meeting, Great Yarmouth. I have to say, that my own clear sense of liberal Christian identity has been invaluable here, and has helped me build relationships not only with other Christian denominations, but across the faith and belief spectrum. Ecumenism and multi-faith dialogue based upon respect and honouring of real differences does work!

Q: Does it affect how you are seen by others?
Absolutely! I am seen as a Unitarian and Free Christian. Someone who is rooted in his own tradition, liberal in his theology, and most keen to get effective relationships going with others from all faith and none. I am not, nor am I seen, as some kind of 'inter-faith' minister. Frankly, had that been the case, I doubt I could have got many people interested in this project.

Q: How did the Multi-Faith Chaplaincy evolve?
It came out of the need to serve our diverse community. I felt for some time that the historic model of visiting Christian Chaplaincy was not sufficient for the needs of the college community.

Q: What size is the College?
Around 12,000 students, something like 4,000 full-time and 8,000 part-time,

Q: How many Chaplains are there in the Team?
We have some 15 Associate Chaplains (plus me as Chaplaincy Coordinator). They are leaders in their faith communities – and they represent the following faiths and traditions. Christians are: Roman Catholic (2 Dominican nuns), Anglican, Methodist, United Reformed Church, Baptist, Salvation Army, Quaker and Unitarian and Free Christian (2 including me). Non-Christians are: Muslim, Jewish (2), Sikh and Humanist.

Q: What are the main areas the Team covers?
The Team exists to promote community cohesion, and to find ways to celebrate and affirm the diversity of student identity within the college; as long as, in so doing, they do not compromise or undermine the identity of others!

Q: And in practice, how is this achieved?
Well, for example, the Associate Chaplains visit Tutor groups and explain the essentials of their various traditions. We also organise joint events which celebrate one or more aspects of these traditions. Essentially, we offer talks and provide



The Rev Chris Wilson speaks at a Holocaust Memorial Day event organised by the Chaplaincy Team at Cambridge Regional College in January. The Rev Andrew Brown is third from right. Photo by Jim Corrigan

resources as required by students or the college. We do not do counselling, as the college has specialists who can offer such support, but we are always willing to offer a listening ear, tea and prayer! I am pleased that the Rev Andrew Brown, the Unitarian Minister in Cambridge, is also part of the team, and his contribution has been powerful and informed.

Q: What is your specific role in all this?
My role is to do all of the above – and to co-ordinate the Team. My role as College Chaplain is salaried and full-time, with my Associate Ministry at Old Meeting, Great Yarmouth on top! I have also been co-opted as a member of the National Council of Faiths and Beliefs in Further Education. And, arising from my chaplaincy work, I have now been asked to serve as Chaplain to the Mayor of Cambridge, from April 2009.

Q: So what do you do on a day-to-day basis?
Briefly, I do the following: identify and organise events; prepare press releases and give interviews for radio and local TV; organise visits of faith speakers to tutor groups; direct students to local faith or belief communities and support students in their identities. I also oversee the use of college rooms for prayer and reflection and I oversee the Associate Chaplains ... and more!

Q: What are the main problems the Team encounters?
The team works well together, and problems have been few and quickly overcome. We have regular Team meetings where all issues are discussed. But I think the key as been our clear sense of individual identity, which means we all know where the other is coming from. Fundamentalism of various kinds has only rarely surfaced and has been quickly challenged.

Q: How widespread are these Multi-Faith Chaplaincy Teams in the UK?

There are very few, perhaps three or four, at the moment. But more are starting up, following the Cambridge example.

Q: Are Unitarians involved in these teams at other institutions?

Not to my knowledge, but we do need a national representative in the national body, the National Council of Faiths and Beliefs in Further Education. I am there, but representing my college.

Jim Corrigan is a member of the Golders Green congregation.

Letters to the Editor

Funders should consider Congregations' needs

To the Editor:

I have been very interested in the recent months to read of the heart-warming news of the Todmorden Church with its improved condition, its growing use and numbers. Ann Latham's letter concerning Kidderminster New Meeting struck a chord with me. Ann told us that New Meeting could get help from the Historic Churches Trust as a redundant church, but not as a 'working' one. At Gellionnen, as a Welsh chapel, we will receive help from CADW (the historic environment service of the Welsh Assembly Government), but the stipulations are rigorous. I, for one, had hoped two small pews to the left side of the pulpit would be removed, allowing for safer space for our worthy tea maker Sandor Nemeth to brew up, a little more space for the display of literature and the visitors' book and sufficient space for a wheelchair or a baby buggy. We have been told this cannot be allowed, despite the fact that these pews are not used, but two long pews, immediately in front of the pulpit, may be taken out. Obviously CADW are trying to be helpful, but taking out those two pews will further remove the congregation from the speaker in the pulpit. Surely we need to consider the life of the building and its people, as well as its historic past. Or, should we, in the historic fashion, present ourselves each Sunday morning in flannel shirts and petticoats and wearing knitted hose?

Marian Littlepage

Pontardawe

Fellowships that can't pay are dropped

To the Editor:

I am glad to read from Jane Barton that the Worthing Fellowship is alive and well, though it does not appear in the new-style GA Directory. Neither does the Harrogate Fellowship. Why are neither of these fellowships recognised in our denominational directory? Well, I don't know about Worthing, but I can tell you why in the case of Harrogate – money!

The Harrogate Fellowship, I have to

say, is struggling, and has lost members due to deaths and removals away from the town. We also had a bad experience with the Harrogate Friends' Meeting House, which managed to lose a box containing all our Unitarian literature, as well as a lovely olive wood chalice given by Lesley McKeown. We now meet in members' homes, and are down to about half a dozen people. Consequently we decided not to seek to continue to be recognised as a Fellowship; that is, we are no longer paying the GA Quota. As soon as I notified Essex Hall that the Harrogate Fellowship was no longer going to pay the quota, it immediately became dead as far as HQ is concerned.

I don't know whether the Worthing Fellowship makes a Quota payment, but if it does, then it should certainly be included in the Directory. If it doesn't, then it cannot really complain. Having said that, there used to be a page listing "unofficial" groups, and I think such a page is still worth including. Perhaps the General Assembly Chief Executive Steve Dick, or one of his staff, could respond?

David Arthur

Wakefield

Numerical growth is possible, essential

To the Editor:

In the 2006, '07, '08 and '09 editions of Whittaker's Almanack, we are told that the size of the Unitarian denomination is 4400 members in about 200 congregations. In the analysis used by Jeff Teagle for his Relly Beard lecture we learn that, excluding Ireland and one British District, the total membership at 2005 was 4012. Popularis, organisers of the election for the new executive, issued 3933 – the number of members for which a quota payment had been made as at September 2007 – ballot papers. Of those 3933 ballot papers sent out, only 1726 valid ballots were returned. The Executive was elected by less than 50% of the membership. (Why were voting figures not given for each candidate?)

These figures should concern us. Not so much the election result, candidates were probably insufficiently known by the non-voting members, but the

membership figures. Firstly, the 2005 figure of 4012 and the constant figure of 4400 over the period 2006 – 2009. There really is no discrepancy between the two figures. The Teagle Analysis gives a congregational average membership of 22 and an extrapolation to 200 congregations will give a figure of 4400. The question they raise is, 'Has there really been no change in the size of the denomination over those four years?' Popularis gives us the answer – 'Yes there has been a change – a decrease of 467 at 2007. Why then the 2008/9 figures of 4400?'

These figures clearly demonstrate that we are in very serious decline – a decline that has been going on for, at least, the last 40 years. The time is long overdue whereby the denomination must begin to address the need for numerical growth. We must set up an organisation – as per the 2006 GA Resolution on Numerical Growth – to co-ordinate such an initiative. It could be responsible for collecting and publishing up-to-date membership figures on an annual basis, distributing other relevant information, monitoring progress of growth initiatives within congregations, working with the National Unitarian Fellowship in the creation of new fellowships, and organise a pilot scheme to convince the denomination that growth is possible. None of this will be an easy task – all the more reason why there should be no further delay.

Peter Whitham

Hartlepool

Denomination name should change, evolve

To the Editor:

Since first becoming a Unitarian, I have found the name both unappealing and archaic. I now suspect it may even be counterproductive to our growth and therefore our survival. It says nothing about what we stand for nowadays, and certainly cannot mean anything to a casual enquirer.

I think it is high time we had a name which says and means something of significance, while sending a clear message to the wider community. 'The Universal Fellowship' is my favourite,

(Continued on next page)

The 'reality' of the slums of Mumbai

By John Hewerdine

This morning on the radio news, I heard the predictable announcement that the movie 'Slumdog Millionaire' has won "best film", along with six other awards, at last night's BAFTA ceremony in London. Danny Boyle, the director, also received an award. I saw the film a few days ago and was rather disturbed by the violence, particularly in the opening scenes. An elderly couple, further along the row where we were seated, left the cinema within the first ten minutes of the start of the film. What a shame that a film has to have this added element in order to make it a resounding success at the end of the first decade of the 21st century.

It could be said that the riot scene was only communicating the reality of life in India at the present time. Indeed, there is much in the film to commend it. Most of the images we see from the Indian sub-continent tend to glamorise life there. In the case of "Slumdog Millionaire" the director glamorises poverty. In some respects this is not a bad thing. At least it reveals something of the lives



Dev Patel and Freida Pinto in 'Slumdog Millionaire'. Photo courtesy of Fox Searchlight

of the *real* people who are normally just represented as a general under-class. The film does explore many of the realities which we know to exist but the majority of us (both here and in India) prefer to ignore. In particular it confronts exploitation of children as beggars with vivid and disturbing reality.

It is not my intention to put lots of you off going to see the film. Rather, I would say, if you can hack a little violence in the right context, go along and see an excellent film but do not expect it to be the "feel good" movie you might have been led to expect. It has an up-beat ending but the journey to get there is far from plain sailing.

Letters

(Continued from previous page)

partly because it might hold some appeal for our American friends, but mainly because it says what I believe we purport to be.

No doubt most Unitarians would throw up their hands in horror at the very idea of changing our name. Tradition and sentiment play a big hand in this resistance. But if we hope to grow, then I think we need to present a stronger image and message, and changing our name may well be a good start.

As we celebrate Barack Obama's presidential victory and Darwin's 200th birthday this year, may I recommend that we give some consideration to the words 'change' and 'evolve'. We shouldn't think of our name as set in stone – let's not become old fossils! Change and adaptation are essential for "the survival of the fittest" as I understand it.

This is a strong message coming from the both the White House and the

Natural History Museum, and we might do worse than to follow suit.

Nick Morrice

Godalming Unitarians at Meadow Chapel

Spiritual growth or palliative care?

To the Editor:

I was moved by Roger Chapman's letter on 'Going beyond the hymn sandwich' (*Inquirer* 7715, 7 February 2009).

I am not so sure that the distinction between the traditional and psychological approaches in services is always as great as he finds it. Nevertheless I am in no doubt that it is the latter which is what attracts the great majority of those who have come to identify themselves as Unitarians in recent years.

My experience as a lay preacher in the London & South-Eastern District has taught me that, sadly, many of our

congregations have passed the point of no return. My rule of thumb is that if I – who collect my bus pass in April – am the youngest person present, then what I am doing is providing palliative care. A valuable thing to do, of course – but in all honesty not why I allowed my name to go on the roll in the first place.

Our future, so far as I can see, and always assuming that we are to have one, lies in the planting of new fellowships, free of denominational baggage of any sort, which can promote the psychological approach to spirituality that Roger Chapman and others want to see – without treading on the toes of any more traditionally-minded members. I would hope that the incoming Executive Committee will put this at the top of their "to do" list.

Mike Killingworth
London

News in brief

Bury raises £1,300 for Home-Start



The Unitarian General Assembly President Joyce Ashworth led Bury Unitarian Church's Sunday morning service on 11 January. At this service she presented a cheque from the church's 2008 charity appeal to the local director of Home-Start, Kate Brooks, along with the Rev Jeff Gould (l) and Betty Kenyon (r). The final amount raised was £1,308. At the Sunday morning service on Sunday 8 February, the church opened its new charity project for 2009 in support of the Arthritis Research Campaign.

Help needed for Unitarian website

The Communications Commission Web Panel invites you to take part in an interactive online study to discover how you think the information on the website should be organised.

The study will use an online tool to present a list of all the main items that will appear on the new website. You can then create categories by dragging and dropping items into different areas. If you would like to participate, please e-mail webfeedback@unitarian.org.uk Further instructions will then be provided. This exercise will be useful in informing future development of the website, rather than the panel imposing preconceived ideas of how it should be organised.

— Diane Bennett

Fund raising goes swimmingly

Pat Oliver, of the Hinckley congregation, celebrates her 50th wedding anniversary this year (and turns 70 as well). In addition to the party she and Eric are holding to mark the occasion, she swam 50 lengths in ¾ hour on 9 January. And, she raised the magnificent total of £335 for chapel funds as a result.

— Linda Phillips

John Pounds congregation sent 173 presents

John Pounds Church in Portsmouth sent 173 shoe boxes filled with gifts, to the local refugees for battered wives at Christmas. All wrapped in coloured paper, they looked so good in church, some were sorry to see them go!

— Betty Calderara

Singers needed for recording

On Saturday, 7 March, Unitarians from across the country will gather at Cross St Chapel, Manchester from 10.30am to 4.30pm in order to record a professional-standard CD of hymns to support the new hymnbook, 'Sing Your Faith'. Please pass on this message to anyone in your congregation who might enjoy this day. David Dawson, who is leading the

session, says: A good time *will* be had by all! Contact David Dawson for additional details and/or expressing interest: Tel 01943 608354 or e-mail dcdawson3@hotmail.com

The new hymn book is now at the printers and will be available in time of the GA Meetings in April at Chester. Some congregations have already ordered their copies and will collect them at Chester – allowing them to carriage costs. All congregations received an order form in a GA mailing in December.

Thanks to volunteers who processed the words and music, this hard-back book with 231 hymns will sell at only £10. 'Sing Your Faith' contains all new material – much by living British Unitarian hymn writers and composers.

Order forms may be requested from Audrey Longhurst: e-mail: alonghurst@unitarian.org.uk or tel: 020 7240 2384; or from David Dawson.

New branch of Women's League



Kingswood Meeting House in Hollywood, near Birmingham, has bucked the trend again. The number of Women's League Branches has diminished in recent years, but Kingswood has re-formed it's Branch of the League, which was closed many years ago.

On Thursday 5 February, they held their first meeting, which was attended by 17 people – despite the severe wintry weather conditions. The meeting was lively and led by President Jo Chandler. Members discussed the way they wished their branch to go. Subscriptions were also discussed and amounts were agreed. Several interesting ideas were put forward for future Meetings.

After a most amusing talk by Jo on the 'Credit Crunch' and how it was dealt with in the days of yore, members enjoyed tea and biscuits.

Then once more out into the snow the happy crowd trudged homeward looking forward to their next meeting on 5 March.

— Marina Caddick

Send your congregation's news items to *The Inquirer* on inquirer@btinternet.com